

## An examination of the special education teacher training programs in Turkey and European Union member countries in terms of language development and communication education

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### Abstract

The academic terms and the periods of the courses related to the language development and communication differs considerably in the programs of the countries which train teachers for the special education department. The aim of this study is to examine the contents and credits of the communication and the language development courses in Teacher Education Programs for hearing-impaired, intellectual disability, gifted and talented multiple disabilities, visual impairment education at the special education department. In this study in which the descriptive research method is used, the data have been collected from the sources of Turkey and European Union member countries, called Agencies of the European Union, Eurydice-Network on Education Systems and Policies in Europe. The courses in Special Education Teacher Training undergraduate programs of higher education institutions of each country stated in the reports of National Education System Descriptions have been examined to reach these data. While there are undergraduate programs for four years of study related to each disability type in Turkey, it has been seen that the department of hearing impaired education teacher training is the department which mainly includes the language development and communication skills courses among mentioned programs. The countries such as Luxemburg, Sweden, Greece, Belgium, Ireland, Finland Ireland and Lithuania give common ground courses of special education department to the preservice teachers in 6 to 7 academic terms.

Keywords: Special education, teacher training program, communication and language development education

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## 1. Introduction

The individual who needs special education and has been diagnosed with disability depending on these needs shows statistically significant differences from the expected level in terms of individual and developmental characteristics, educational performances (MEB [Ministry of National Education], 2015, European Agency- EC, 2016). The policies which are based on the needs and which enable the integration of the individual into the society are needed to increase the quality of the special education services (Sucuoglu & Kargin, 2006). In this sense, it is necessary to examine the individualist and social policies. Individualist policies focus on the existing disability and accept that the function restriction of the individual is a result of his/her disability. On the other hand, social policies see the function restriction as the base of the needs of the individual and emphasize that this function restriction results from inappropriate regulations. These policies link the inappropriate regulations with the family and education environments. Both individualist and social policies have been affecting the special education policies of all countries (Akcemete, 2009; Cook & Friend, 2010; CEC, 2009; Karkcay, 2002; Ozyurek, 2004; UNICEF, 2005). Creating the programs which are based on the social approach is also related to the teacher competency. Because the programs based on the social approach concentrate on the individualizing the education; adapting the general education programs and preparing the individualized curriculums (Karkcay, 2002; Ozyurek, 2004). Thus, it is aimed to create education environments which include all learners, consider the individual differences of the students and meet the needs of them (EC, 2006; Salend & Duhaney, 1999). Besides, it is aimed to develop the professional knowledge and skills of the teachers that will be assigned at the highest level during the undergraduate study (Cook & Friend, 2010; Kayhan, 2016).

It is mandatory to make the necessary regulations to include the students with special needs, who show different developmental characteristics than their peers in educational environments (MEB, 2008). It has been accepted in Turkey that the individuals who were diagnosed with one or more of attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, motor speech disorder, mental and behaviour disorder, visual disability, auditory disability, physical disability, autism spectrum disorder, special learning disability, cerebral palsy, chronic diseases, mental deficiency and giftedness need special education and supportive educational services (MEB, 2012a, 2012c). At the present time, the concepts, diagnosis criteria, and the changes in the evaluation and placement affect the educational services (CEC, 2009, Kırcaali-İftar, 1992; MEB, 2012a; Sherman, 2008, UNICEF, 2005, 2007). While inclusive education is given to a growing number of the children with special educational needs, the quality of the services are affected by the number of employees, professional competency, and physical regulations. In this regard, the international organizations Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), Division for Early Childhood (DEC), The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have been published a declaration on what the qualified inclusion is and how it is applied. Primarily, the quality criteria for the education that the students who continue pre-school, primary, secondary and higher education will receive have been determined in the joint declaration text which includes education-training, social participation and ethical rules (CEC, 2010; UNICEF, 2005).

The academic terms and the periods of the courses related to the language development and communication differs considerably in the programs which train teachers for special education department. Societies attach importance to the educational institutions to raise qualified, productive, healthy generations. For a qualified education, it is important that children join the educational environment and are supported in the fields of language, cognitive and affective development (EC, 2006; EC, 2015; EC, 2016a; EC, 2016b; MEB, 2012,a; 2012c).

The attitudes and personnel training are significant for applying the legal regulations regarding special education and making policies effectively. In this regard, it is necessary to restructure the school, to specialize in personnel training, to qualify physical regulations by providing financial and material support in the 21st century. To support language, speech and communication skills, it is highly significant to popularize early education, to determine the individuals with special educational

needs in early periods and to enable them to benefit from appropriate education right (e.g. Sign language) (Pistav-Akmese, 2016). Besides, it is also significant to train families about communication and language, to provide information support to the personnel by in-service training and to provide them with the professional development opportunity.

It is necessary to examine the special education teacher training programs' qualities with regard to the competence of the teachers who are in charge of the children who continue special education regarding their disability level. It is thought that examination of the courses regarding language development, communication and speech disorders and the courses for supporting language development of the children will be able to contribute to the regulations for supporting language development of children in Turkish special education teacher training system. Besides, assessment of the situation in European Union (EU) member states, which we are in a harmonization process, shall be a guide for evaluating special education training programs.

### *1.2. Purpose of study*

This study is to examine contents and credits of the communication courses and the language development in Teacher Education Programs for hearing-impaired, intellectual disability, gifted and talented, multiple disabilities, visual impairment education at the special education department.

### *1.3. Methods*

A descriptive research whose aim is to examine the current situation of the communication and the language development courses given in special education teacher education programs applied in Turkey and the EU member countries in terms of variety, content, number and credits of courses. Analysis method was employed to current study (Yıldırım & Simsek, 2006), European Agency, Eurydice (Information Network on Education in Europe and Network on Education Systems and Policies) in Europe, were used to collect data about variables of Turkey and EU member countries. Each country's National System Overview reports are analyzed for the special education teacher training undergraduate courses and the findings regarding these courses were obtained at the end of the analyses (EC, 2006; EC, 2015; EC, 2016a; EC, 2016b; MEB, 2012b; 2012c). The course content and course programs stated in websites of universities included in these reports were the data regarding the academic year and then analyzed, academic term and the credits of the courses content and number were correspondingly explained.

The website of European Agency is the source for the Eurydice, in which the countries publish their educational report, and these reports were used to determine the courses related to communication and language development skills. The website addresses of referred higher education institutions were obtained from these reports published by each country (EC, 2006; EC, 2015; EC, 2016a; EC, 2016b; 2016c; MEB, 2012c). These programs of higher education institutions were determined by examination of their websites. The courses given by programs of these, their syllabus, conditions to be fulfilled to graduate, annual academic calendar and required courses were analyzed. The total education period, diversity of courses, conditions to be accepted to the program, required courses, ECTS credit of each course, conditions to be fulfilled to graduate, its content, and teaching were criteria taken into account while examining the special education teacher training programs and the findings were obtained by converting these data in accordance with the purposes of the study. The detailed national education reports in which the teaching programs of the special education teacher education institutions are explained were analyzed to obtain the data which constituted the findings. The study is limited to some of EU member countries, whose national educational reports are published at European Agency, Eurydice (Eurydice, 2006).

The information about Turkey and EU member countries have been gathered from the online reports on the web addresses European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, Eurydice (EC, 2006; EC, 2015; EC, 2016a; 2016b; 2016c; Eurydice, 2006; MEB, 2015a; MEB, 2012c) and from the addresses of the state universities in the referred countries, faculty of education, social sciences and educational sciences departments, special education teaching programs department. These available programs have been examined and coding process has been conducted. In the coding process, the two researchers examined these reports and accepted the information on which they reached an agreement as data regarding the courses the teachers who will teach in special education field took, when the courses in language and communication field were given and how many credits they were, how the content of the program was prepared. The data are limited to the reports the researchers reached and the information on which they reached an agreement.

#### *1.4. Findings and Results*

##### *1.4.1. System of Special Education Teacher Education in Turkey*

The special education teacher training program was started as of 1983-84 in the faculty of education of the universities in educational sciences department. This program accepted special education field as a single field and the candidates who graduated from this program participated in the education of visually impaired, hearing impaired, orthopedically disabled, mentally disabled and gifted children. However, with the changes made, Special Education Program has become a "Department" since 1997-1998 and special education teacher training has divided into five different departments such as Hearing-Impaired Teaching, Visually Impaired Teaching, Mentally Disabled Teaching, High Disability Teaching Program and Gifted Teaching. As appointments and work areas of the graduate preservice teachers differs, special field competencies has been formed for every department in special education departments (MEB, 2008; MEB, 2012a). It is highly significant that the courses for language development, communication and speech disorders, and the courses for supporting language development in early childhood which are included in the program are examined in terms of duration and content to state how the teachers get the special field competence for supporting language- speech development and communication, which are important for the education of children with special educational needs. As is seen, special education program was transformed into "department" as of 1997-1998 in our country and the teachers started to be trained in 5 different departments. In 2016, the different departments in the special education field were transformed into one single program, "Special Education Teaching" by Higher Education Institution (YOK [Higher Education Institution], 2016).

A great majority of the EU member countries such as Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Holland, Hungary, Sweden, Spain, Luxemburg, and Lithuania gives the courses related to teaching language development and the communication as the compulsory courses, and the age of children that the preservice teachers are going to teach and the type of the disability are the criteria to determine these courses. Special education supports in several countries such as Hungary, Luxemburg, Lithuania, and Holland cover also the migrant and poor children and their families who suffer from social, cultural problems and language-related deprivations (EC, 2016a; EC, 2016b; 2016c). According to the report published by Ministry of National Education, it has been stated that 259.282 students (male: 160.866, female: 98416) continue formal education in primary, secondary I, high school and higher education institutions in the 2014-2015 academic year (MEB, 2015b). Thus, the quality of the education that the teachers who will teach the children with special educational needs should be questioned, multiculturalism, evaluation skills, application skills and observation skills should be determined in the regulations regarding the program.

While there are undergraduate programs for four years of study related to each disability type in Turkey, it has been seen that department of hearing impaired education teacher training is the department which mainly includes the language development and communication skills courses

among mentioned programs. The countries such as Luxemburg, Sweden, Greece, Belgium, Ireland, Finland Ireland and Lithuania give common ground courses of special education department to the preservice teachers in 6 to 7 academic terms. The midterm proficiency exams are held to determine the expertise of the successful preservice teachers such as preschool or elementary school special education teacher in accordance with the type of disability. If they work as a teaching staff, they will be qualified for working in both areas receiving a title of a qualified personnel, both as a teaching staff and field of studies such as visual impairment, hearing-impaired and intellectual disability by continuing education for 1 or 1.5 years more peculiar to the age group. Table 1 shows number of courses related to the language development and the communication skills distribution according to years, in special teacher education programs of Turkey and some of the EU member countries

Table 1. The Number of the Courses Related to the Communication and the Language Development Education in Special Education Teacher Education Programs of Turkey and Some of the EU Member Countries (EC, 2006; EC, 2015; EC, 2016a; 2016b; 2016c; MEB, 2012a; 2012c).

Countries	1 <sup>st</sup> year	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Total
Austria	1	1	-	-	2
Belgium	2	2	-	1	5
Cyprus	2	-	1	-	3
Denmark	2	-	1	-	3
Finland	2	1	1	-	4
Greece	4	2	2	2	10
Holland	2	-	-	1	3
Hungary	2	2	-	-	4
Ireland	1	4	1	-	6
Lithuania	2	2	-	1	5
Luxemburg	4	3	2	3	12
Malta	2	1	-	-	3
Poland	-	2	-	1	3
Portugal	1	2	1	-	4
Slovenia	2	1	-	-	3
Spain	2	1	-	1	4
Sweden	1	3	1	-	5
The Czech Republic	2	2	-	-	4
Turkey	1	5	1	-	7

Table 1 stated the courses in for different department in total including visually impaired, hearing impaired, mentally disabled and gifted were reviewed in Turkey. When these courses examined, it has been found that there are two courses consisting of "Language Development and Adaptation of Communication Skills" (3 ECTS) and "Teaching Sign Language Alphabet for Visually and Hearing Impaired" (3 ECTS) in the fourth academic term of Visually Impaired Teacher Training; four different courses consisting of "Language Development and Communication" (3 ECTS) in the second academic term, "Hearing Impaired and Language" (3 ECTS) in the second academic term, "Communication Skills in Hearing Impaired" (3 ECTS) in the fourth academic term, "Alternative Communication Methods in Hearing Impaired" (2 ECTS) in the sixth academic term of Hearing Impaired Teacher Training; one course names "Adaptation of Communication Skills to Mentally Disabled" (3 ECTS) in the fourth academic term of Mentally Disabled Teacher Training and there are not any courses regarding language and communication in Gifted Teacher Training (MEB, 2008; YOK, 2016). Table 2 shows the total ECTS credits of the language development and the communication teaching courses.

Table 2. Course ECTS Credits Related to the Language Development and the Communication Education in Special Teacher Education Programs of Turkey and Some of the EU Member Countries (EC, 2006; EC, 2015; EC, 2016a; 2016b; 2016c; MEB, 2012a; 2012c).

Countries	1 <sup>st</sup> year	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	4 <sup>th</sup> year	ECTS credits (Total)
Austria	7	3	-	-	10
Belgium	8	8	-	10	26
Cyprus	9	-	9	-	18
Denmark	11	-	9	-	20
Finland	9	6	6	-	21
Greece	6	7	8	11	32
Holland	12	-	-	6	18
Hungary	8	7	-	-	15
Ireland	4	19	4	-	27
Lithuania	6	10	-	6	22
Luxemburg	7	8	15	6	36
Malta	9	4	-	-	13
Poland	-	8	-	4	12
Portugal	5	8	5	-	18
Slovenia	6	3	-	-	9
Spain	15	6	-	9	30
Sweden	8	16	10	-	34
The Czech Republic	8	8	-	-	16
Turkey	3	15	3	-	21

Table 2 states the variety of the credits and academic terms of the communication and the language development teaching courses in special education teacher education programs of the countries. Moreover, there are not any significant differences observed between Turkey and EU member countries in terms of the credits of the language development and the communication teaching courses all the courses to be taken.

Generally, language development, communication related courses are taught in the 1st or 2nd academic term of the undergraduate programs of all countries except for Turkey and Poland among EU member countries. It can be seen that there have not been any courses to support language development or communication skills in 3rd or 4th academic term in Cyprus, Denmark, and Holland. However, except for Austria and Slovenia, the courses to support language development and communication skills differs between 15 and 36 credits in 8 academic terms in Turkey and most of the EU member countries. It has been stated that the courses have 15 credit in Hungary, 16 in the Czech Republic, 32 in Greece, 34 in Sweden and 36 in Luxemburg while they have 9 credits in Slovenia and 10 in Austria. It is remarkable that the total credits in which at least one course regards communication and language field are above 30 in every academic year in Luxemburg and Greece.

Table 3 shows the findings about the content of the language development and the communication teaching courses in special education teacher training programs of the countries.

Table 3. Content of the Language Development and the Communication Teaching courses in the Special Education Teacher Training Programs of Turkey and Some of the EU Member Countries (EC, 2006; EC, 2015; EC, 2016a; 2016b; 2016c; MEB, 2012a; 2012c)

Course content				
Countries	1 <sup>st</sup> year	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	4 <sup>th</sup> year
Austria	Language theories and language development	Language teaching to Disabled children	-	-
Belgium	Language and culture differences	Neuroscientific language development	-	Language teaching
Cyprus	Language development and learning	-	Language evaluation	-
Denmark	Communication, Language disorders	-	Reading, language approaches	-
Finland	Primary and secondary language acquisition	Evaluation of the language	Language acquisition in disabled people	-
Greece	Learning and Teaching	Bilingualism and education	Psycho-pedagogy of comm.	Communication
Holland	Language and language development	-	-	Language and teaching
Hungary	Principles of communication	Brain and language	-	-
Ireland	Speech-language impairment	Communicating with children	literacy and learning	-
Lithuania	Communication Psychology	Education for Children with Speech and Language Disorders	-	Language theories
Luxemburg	Development of Multilingualism Children	Multilingualism and Multimodality	Sing language teaching	Evaluation of the language
Malta	Language development, literacy in early period	Multilingualism and children with disabilities	-	-
Poland	-	Literacy language difficulties	-	Language acquisition
Portugal	Bilingual education	Language and culture	Language theories, communication.	-
Slovenia	Language development	Language theories	-	-
Spain	Communication and language	Language theories	-	Evaluation of the language
Sweden	Language and interaction	Language and notion development	Language evaluations	-
The Czech Republic	Language and culture	Language theories and communication	-	-
Turkey	Language Development and Adaptation of Communication Skills Teaching Sign Language Alphabet to Visually and Hearing Impaired Language Development and Communication	Hearing Impaired and Language Hearing Impaired Communication Skills Hearing Impaired Alternative Communication Mentally Disabled Communication Skills Acquisitions	Alternative Communication Methods for Hearing Impaired	-

Table 3 reveals that Turkey and some of the EU member countries focus on similar topics such as basic principles of language development and communication education, its basic concepts in their language development and the communication courses given in special education teacher training programs. When the contents and subject distributions of the courses that the special education

preservice teachers take regarding the language and communication are examined, countries like Belgium and Czech Republic give courses on cultural differences, Austria, Cyprus Luxemburg, Malta, Spain, Sweden, Portugal and Turkey give courses on language development theories and communication, language and learning, language and interaction, bilingual education in the first and second academic terms (1st year). Another important detail is that the countries transformed language development and communication-related courses into application in the 4th year. Studying the language development and communication skills in the students with special educational needs leads to field competencies such as game and sign language.

### *1.5. Conclusions and Recommendations*

When the data were analyzed, academic terms of the courses and credits related to communication and language development in the programs that train teachers for special education department vary from country to country and there are significant differentiations in the course contents. Special education field has been opened as a department and the level of the specialization has been determined in accordance with the disability in the countries like France, Holland, Sweden, and Lithuania. Preservice teachers gain a competence that serves as an introduction to the special education field by taking the shared courses in the first years of the undergraduate program. The undergraduate programs are generally between the range of 4-5.5 years and preservice teachers who determine their area of specialization especially at the end of the 8th academic term become specialists in the fields like visually impaired, hearing impaired, intellectually disabled by continuing their education for 1-1.5 years and gain the competence necessary for working in both of the two fields (EC, 2006; YOK, 2016).

When the programs which train teachers for the visually, hearing and mentally impaired fields in Turkey are examined, it has been stated that the courses regarding communication and language development are given in different academic terms and they have different credits. It has been found that there are two courses in 158 credited visually impaired teacher training, four courses in 153 credited hearing impaired teacher training, one course in 147 credited mentally disabled teacher training and there are not any courses regarding language and communication in the gifted teacher training program (YOK, 2016).

The findings of this study are thought to be able to contribute to the regulations to be made to European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) in accordance with the courses which are found in the programs of hearing-impaired, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities gifted, and talented, visual impairment education in the department of special education. It has been stated that the teachers should develop skills and knowledge regarding the language development and communication, which is important for effectively using language development and communication in education of children with special educational needs.

It has been seen that the education policies of the countries whose mission is to train teachers effectively aim to graduate teachers who search for the latest development and can follow the scientific and technological developments pursuant to our age, are open to changes, accept the individual differences and can teach according to universal design principles (Kayhan, 2016). It has been thought that it is important for the teachers to be directed to the studies regarding the language development and communication, to be provided with responsibilities in courses and social projects. Knowledge level of the preservice teachers about how to improve the language development and communication skills is important for the language development of the children with special educational needs. In this sense, it can be suggested that the language courses regarding the disability type should be given to the preservice teachers and sign language should be a compulsory course in undergraduate programs.



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